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AUTHOR Garnett, Norma A.
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ABSTRACT

La Escuelita, a Warwick (Rhode Island) Spanish language instruction program for children in grades 3 through 6, originated in 1983 in a group-tutoring program and expanded under the auspices of the local Parent-Teacher Association into an after-school activity for all city schoolchildren. The PTA undertook the administrative tasks, and the founders gathered a small faculty. The initial enrollment was 27 students. Policies emphasizing homework and parental involvement were established. Teaching methods, primarily audio-lingual, were geared to the age group, with emphasis on the spoken language in the third and fourth grades and with the addition of writing at the higher levels. Specific skill objectives were established for each grade level. Fees were set to pay for teacher and administrator salaries and supplies. Session schedules were coordinated with the PTA Council, but scheduling of classroom time was delegated to the school directors. An open house at the end of each school session has included a demonstration of learned skills and cultural knowledge and the awarding of certificates of merit to graduating students. Native speakers visit the classes; audiovisual programs, folk-dance demonstrations, and crafts activities are provided for enrichment. While some problems have arisen, such as money management, student placement, and publicity, the program has been generally successful. (MSE)

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Dr. Norma A. Garnett

Establishing a Primary Level School of Spanish

It is considered to be of sound educational basis to establish a primary-level school for second language learning. Generally such schools are being established by direction from some educational system that wants to change the personality of emphasis of a particular school. But how does one establish a primary-level school for second language learning without the support of such an educational system? How can it be established without this strong backing?

Most agree about the appropriateness of starting children at a young age to learn a foreign language. Positive research is available on early language learning and on the biological/neurological/sociological/emotional factors involved. There is good reason for establishing a primary-level school for second language learning but how can one do it without the help from these large educational institutions that give it support and sustinence?

One pattern is found in Warwick, Rhode Island, where a primary-level school for learning Spanish for children grades 3 to 6 was established in 1983. It was not established by direction of an educational system but was, however, effectively supported by one. This is what and how it was done when La Escuelita was established two years ago.

The see for the school came from personal experience of teaching Spanish to young children in a home. It was a group-tutoring situation more than a "school". There were approximately six children, boys and girls, from grades 2 to 6. One teacher was a young woman from Spain and the other, the head of a Foreign Language Department of a comprehensive high school. Both women were convinced about the appropriateness of early beginnings of learning Spanish for young children. They had read the research done on second language learning for children and this, along with the year and a

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half experience of home group-tutoring, had convinced them.. They felt that La Escuelita should be expanded from the original homebase to a broader base and therefore be made available to more young children.

Once this decision had been made the first step was to make personal contact with the people who might potentially be supportive of the proposed school. The Director of Extended-Day Services of the Warwick School Department was contacted. School officials were approached because it was thought that it would be more effective to have La Escuelita in the formal school setting found in a regular school building. The school environment could have a positive effect due to past educational conditioning. Also, it would be more comfortable with each student having his or her own desk. The chalkboard would be available for classroom use and this was a learning tool that was missing in the home environment. The school official agreed that La Escuelita could meet in a school building and that it could be made available some day after the regular school hours. However, he pointed out that without being under the "umbrella protection" of the school system one would have to pay rent, janitorial service, light, heat, insurance, etc. He suggested for this type of protection and support, it could be obtained if sponsored by the PTA Council and then it could automatically get in under that "umbrella". This Council is the organizational unit for all the PTA's or PTO's in the city of Warwick.

Therefore, the President of the PTA Council was approached and to her was explained this interest in establishing a primary-level school for teaching Spanish to the children of grades 3-6. This proposed "school" would be available to all the children in the city on an after-school basis. Under the auspices of the PTA Council the school offering would be similar to their regular extended-day enrichment programs which traditionally have been made available.

The President of the PTA Council took this proposal to her Executive Board and thereafter offered an opportunity to the directors of La Escuelita to personally explain the proposed school to the Executive Board. This opportunity was accepted and their proposal was directly explained to the Board. The philosophy, objectives, policies, methods of instruction and curriculum for the individual grades were presented. The chosen texts and reference materials which would be used were exhibited. There was a sincere attempt to make everything clear and understood by all concerned. Very shortly thereafter the directors were informed of the positive vote, not unanimous however. As a whole, they did receive the enthusiastic support of the PTA Council who immediately formed a small committee to work with the co-directors on the project and to oversee their part of the responsibilities. The responsibilities of the PTA Council were related to areas of registration, fees, money collecting, paying of salaries, PR, distrituion of informational bulletins, and choice of the school site. They did not become involved in the school philosophy, policies, objectives, methods, curriculum text or materials selection, or faculty hifing. In other words, the Council handled the business aspect of La Escuelita.

After establishing the support teams, the next step was to prepare the faculty to open in the fall of 1983. The co-directors met with several young teachers of Spanish, all experienced and employed, and explained to them the possibility of joining the faculty of La Escuelita. Also it was explained that the faculty choice would be related to the demand of the actual enrollment figures. According to the stated design, there should be no more than 15 students per class. As it turned out, the first session had three classes of nine students each so that one young language teacher started on the faculty immediately, teaching along with the two co-directors.

As a foundation for La Escuelita a philosophy was stated:

> The young child has an astute tonal ability and a natural curiosity and an open mindedness that should be utilized in early learning of foreign languages. Today no foreign languages are offered in classes for the students in the elementary level. The present day economic, social and political situation in the United States makes the learning of a second language important for our national safety, economic success, and social adjustment.

Also stated were four objectives:

1. To develop a positive attitude to language/culture differences.
2. To develop inital sound training in the distinction of Spanish language segments.
3. To control elementary conversational expressions, vocabulary, and verbs.
4. To communicate in Skpanish through various activities including plays, songs, games, questions/answers, conversation.

The stated policies for La Escuelita numbered six:

1. Study or practice assignments are to be given after each class and should be prepared for the following class. Parental support is appreciated.

Thereby we immediately established a policy of homework and parental involvement. From one Friday afternoon class to the next Friday afternoon class we wanted a tie-over, that extra practice of doing the homework in order to reinforce the learning now in process. Also, it was felt that stron parental involvement would strengthen the learning process of the dildren.

2. Discipline during the class will be thorough and consistent. No provision for supervising children before, as well as after, c class-time is made.

It sometimes occurs that leaders of groups of youngsters function as an inexpensive baby-sitter for the parents. This was not to happen. La Escuelita was a very serious undertaking and it would not be desirous for parents to feel that it was going to be a time free of responsibilities for them.

4. For steady progress in learning regular attendance, as well as promptness to each class, is strongly suggested. The normal school attendance schedule is to be followed.

An effort was being made to create a serious attitude toward La Escuelita. It was important that the children come, come regularly, and come on time for maximum use of class time. By stating ahead of time that the regular school schedule is to be followed then the time and effort involved in having to call each student, if school were to be cancelled due to some inclimate weather, are saved.

5. Course materials consisting of notebook, text, pen or pencil should be brought to each class.

There are extra pens and pencils, crayons and chalk, etc. in school but not extra notebooks or texts. It is very important that each student have these supplies with him or her for a more effective learning experience.

6. It would be appreciated that any special needs of a student be made known to the school staff.

It is well known that many children have special needs. These needs can be met by the faculty only if they are made known to the faculty.

The teaching methods used at La Escuelita are geared toward the learning level of young children. It is basically the audio-lingual method. It is primarily oral for third grade and fourth grade and there is more writing in the fifth and sixth grades. The first activity is to hear the language and then repeat, repeat, repeat. The vocabulary starts with basic identifications; colors, numbers, names, greetings. For the verbs, they start with the ctive berbs by having the students listen and then reppond. SER and ESTAR are used immediately but are learned through conditioning rather than through cognition. There is much motor participation which

is a technique ideal for the young. We try to combine all the learning senses whenever and wherever possible: to hear, to touch, to see, to smell, and to speak. Learning should be active and especially so at this age level.

Various learning activities to develop the language skills are itemized in the curriculum description. At grade three the desired skills to be developed are as follows:

1. counts numbers 1-50
2. tells simple time and dates
3. relates words to pictures
4. expresses greetings
5. tells the differences between singular and plural and obvious genders
6. starts to control negative constructions
7. repeats with correct pronunciation and intonation
8. identifies basic articles of clothing
9. identifies common household objects, school objects
10. identifies basic foods
11. recognizes sound/letter correspondence
12. asks and answers conversational questions
13. recognizes some aspects and information about an hispanic country

For grade four the following skills are to be developed (all of the skills of Grade 3 plus):

1. numbers to 100
2. starts to use nouns, verbs, pronouns, and possessives appropriately
3. selects words to complete oral sentences
4. writes familiar material from dictation
5. organizes pictures in a sequence and tells a story from them
6. practices variations of simple sentences and simple conversations
7. identifies all information on a calendar
8. identifies information on globes and maps about an hispanic country

9. recognizes and participates in the ordinary daily customs of an hispanic country or can at least describe them in his/her native language
10. reads a restricted amount of sentences in some familiar material (text, story book, poetry, game, etc.)
11. answers questions to determine reading comprehension as well as listening comprehension

The desired skills for the fifth grade include all the skills listed for grades 3 and 4 plus the following:

11. numbers in the 100's
2. conjugates present tense of regular verbs and some irregulars and uses this skill in a communicative manner
3. has a limited control of GUSTAR to express him/herself in the area of likes and dislikes
4. reads short narratives, poetry and/or play selections
5. asks and answers questions on reading and in conversations
6. constructs sentences orally using a controlled number of familiar structures
7. uses comparative and superlative of a limited number of adjectives
8. recites from memory some poetry, parts of a play or of a story
9. tells a story from a series of vicual stimuli
10. sings a song or dances a typical dance of some hispanic country
11. recognizes culbural influences and contributions made by various ethnic or national hispanic groups

Finally, the desired skills for the sixth grade include all the skills listed for grades 3, 4, and 5 plus the following:

1. numbers to the thousands
2. develops facility in grammar-use in a controlled and simple sequence of small steps or segments
3. uses vocabulary relating to weather, careers, sports, modes of transportation and so forth
4. uses more advanced verb forms such as the Imperative and the Present Progressive and Immediate Future
5. reads for information and for pleasure

6. writes for information and self-expression in limited prose and/or poetry
7. participates quite freely in a conversation dealing with familiar topics (identification, health, family, interests, foods, etc.)

In establishing a primary-level school for second language learning the financial matters should be arranged at the very beginning. For La Escuelita the fee for each registrant was set at $25, twenty dollars for salaries and five dollars for supplies. We established a fee per session per director to be $250.00 and $200.00 per teaching faculty.

The monies for supplies is given to the directors on the first day of each of the three sessions of La Escuelita. Purchases made are in close coordination with the stated philosophy, objectives, methods and curriculum. These choices are made independently but in conjunction with specific faculty requests or suggestions.

Salaries can be handled by the PTA Council Treasurer of by the business department of the supporting school system. The latter is a more professional way and accordingly more legal. The salary due date generally has been the eighth, or last class day, of each of the three sessions.

Also established at the beginning, and well in advance of opening day, are the dates for each session (three sessions appeared to be convenient for scheduling) and the times for each class. There should be a coordination among the school directors, the agent(s) of the supporting organization. Since in the case of La Escuelita the PTA Council was and is responsible for the distribution of the registration forms and all the publicity, La Escuelita must work in harmony with the Council's own requirements in order to fulfill their responsibilities comfortably, thoroughly and without haste. Working with these support groups to establish a primary-level school of second language, intelligent and thoughtful cooperation is advised.

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Fridays were eventually selected as the best day of the school week for La Escuelita. They listened to the parents themselves who expressed their preferences for finding the leas-involved day.

For La Escuelita the class time was scheduled to start at 3:34 p.m., giving the student time to arrive home from regular school, have a quick snack, and then parents time to drive them to the Spanish school. A centrally located elementary school was selected in order to be fair and considerate in this problem of transportation. Each class time is one hour and 15 minutes, which means dismissing the children at 5 p.m., a convenient hour for any family to still leave for a weekend away if that is on the family schedule.

What they did during this hour and fifteen minutes was decided upon by the co-directors. This is the general procedure followed for each class:

Order	Activity	Time	Method
1.	warm-up and review time of basic daily conversation patterns	10	CR
2.	homework review and check	10	recall stimuli
3.	new lesson	20	appropriate ALM/ association
4.	culture lesson	10	appropriate tactile/visual
5.	physical activity; games, crafts, dance	10	audio-motor
6.	passive conclusion/reward; poem, story, rhymes...	10	aural/oral visual stimuli

As stated in the methods, there is a great deal of oral/aural activities. However, the writing and reading skills are concurrently presented and practiced. There is reading aloud and writing at the chlakboard as well at the desk. The homework is written. Memory work of plays and poems, and many games reinforce previously learned vocabulary and verbs.

La educational distraction is ok:

An occasional dictation is also given for the sound-symbol relationship. The texts used are based on the learning method of cognates and use the association/relationships concepts to expand and further develop the four language skills. Naturally grammar explanations are virtually non-existent during the classes. So the examples of the language segments being drilled are all similar and are approached more by conditioning than by cognition. The more complex structures which appear in the text for the 5th and 6th graders, such as GUSTAR, are carefully approached by limited patterns in he audio/lingual method.

When the readings or stories become more complex (for example the so-called "simple" fairy tales where the past compound subjunctive frequently appears) no attempt is made to explain this to the students. The teacher is the one doing the reading aloud, with some English support and with great animation, and is assisted greatly by the illustrations of the story. Of cours, the story told in Spanish many times is already a familiar one to the children so total understanding is not impossible and from past experience, most probable.

To establish your primary-level school for second language learning this suggested list of steps to be take, and the order in which they could be done, is presented here:

1. Establish a school philosophy, stated objectives, policies, methods, and guiding curriculum.
    a. Develop a possible faculty (needs depend on number of enrollees with a suggested limit of 15 per class). A suggestion is to hire lively and enthusiastic teachers.
    b. Select basic texts and appropriate enrichment materials.

1. Enlist support groups (school department for school facilites' availability, PTA Council, for examples).
    a. Arrange for public announcements, informative brochures and registration forms for school-wide distribution.
    b. Select school site, dates and time of class sessions.

c. Establish financial agreements involving fees, materials, and salaries.

3. Coordination of registrants: factors to be considered are grade-age, prior experience, class size. Recording of all pertinent information of students: health problems, telephone numbers for emergencies, addresses, names of parent or responsible guardian.

   a. Prepare copies of philosophy, stated objectives, policies, methods and curriculum for ditribution to parent (or guardian) on first class day for each session.

   b. Prepare lesson plans, purchas texts and supplementary materials (better if done as early as possible due to the inevitable delay of text arrivals).

   c. Schedule enrichment activities for entire school such as folk-dance lessons, audio-visual program, hispanic guests, etc.

And then comes the opening day! Ours started on November 4, 1983 with 19 students and this year, our third, we started on October 5, 1985 with 42 students.

The coordination of new registrants can present problems even though at first glance it appears to be a simple requirement. Obviously it is better educationally to have new students separated from returning students for curriculum continuity. Also it is better to keep third and fourth graders together and not in the classes of the 5th and 6th graders. What does one do when for the second session in January there are new students in the 4th grade that must be put into the class of 4th graders who are continuing from the first session? Where do you put a 3rd grade Spanish bilingual who could academically be put into a 5th grade class of new students of Spanish but who socially and physically really belongs with his or her peers in the 3rd grade class? Prior to each new session we always hope for a miraculous blend of "just what we want" but know that that is almost impossible. We try to arrange each student individually and hope that the faculty itself can adjust a bit in the individual class for each new situation or problem. So far it has generally turned out quite well for all involved: faculty, student and parent.

Evaluation of the program of La Escuelita is an important part of the academic and educational experience. It is important to know how successfully are we attaining the stated objective and how closely are we operating to the expressed philosophy. To establish some type of evaluative input there is scheduled for the last class of each of the three sessions an Open House for students' parents, other family members, relatives and friends. The first half hour is designated as a demonstration of the classroom activity where what has been going on can be seen as well as explained to the visitors; how the curriculum is progressing and why it is being executed in such a manner or method.

The second half hour is designated as a demonstration by the school in entirety of some learned language skills and cultural knowledge. It often includes the fold-dances learned in one of the past classes, skits, memorized poetry and/or arts and crafts created. This also affords an opportunity for all the children of La Escuelita to see what the other classes have been learning. This is especially true in the area of culture study since each class studies a different country of Spanish-language culture. In addition to enriching the cultural knowledge this way, motivation and interest are also stimulated especially by the fine presentation done by oleder and more advanced students. During this segment at the June Open House all students receive a small gift, something related to the learning of Spanish (una carpeta, for example) and the "graduating" 6th graders receive certificates of merit.

The final 15 minutes are reserved for light refreshments, something prepared at home that relates to some specific country that has been studied. This gives to all a time to informally chat about the students' progress, interest, needs, and successes. Using this as a vehicle for evaluation information much can be learned about the success and failure of La Escuelita on a relaxed and personal level.

Another form of evaluation can be seen in the amount of "reward and punishment" that is meted in each class. Much reward and little punishment has been given. Of course, La Escuelita is not a required academic experience. The learners come with high motivation and interest. Rewards are more common here than in the regular school experience. Punishment, in the form of a verbal reprimand for some negative behavior, is unusual.

Another very useful form of evaluation is the final report which is written by the co-directors following the close of each of the three sessions. This is an all inclusive instrument that puts into a permanent form that which has been accomplished during the session. Such information as total enorllment, male and female, returning or new students are indicated. The faulty personnel responsible for which class, the text material covered and the enrichment materials and activites completed are recorded. The special activities in which the entire school participates are indicated and when they occurred. Costs of purchased materials and faculty salaries are recorded. This recoring of all these details makes an excellent source of information for some future time. For example, this report is based on the information recorded in this manner these past two years. Class lists are also saved and have proven to be of excellent resource for student assignments into other classes at a later date.

These reports are kept in the permanent file of one of the co-directors and copies are distributed to the school official in charge of extended-day services, to the president of the PTA Council for the official files, and one copy to each member of the faculty. This type of instrument affords the directors of La Escuelita a fine opportunity to llok back at the just completed session and to be in a position of valid hin-sight judgment. This can affect the

program and planning very efficiently for the next session.

There now are "graduates" of La Escuelita since four students have completed two years of continuous participation in grades 5 and 6. It was suggested to the participating public school department and then to the guidance department of the Junior High School involved that these four students be scheduled for the Spanish course in the 8th grade curriculum rather than in the normally expected 7th grade curriculum. As of this date, now November of the 1985-86 academic year, their progress at this accelerated level has been motiroed and all four "graduates" are having success at this level. This, indeed, is a positive evaluative measure of the effectiveness of this primar-school experience for the study of Spanish for these students. We estimate that these four students have accomplished in the two years approximately 60 intensive hours of Spanish study which would equate approximately one semester's work in a regular school where the scheddle is rotating (i.e. where each class meets four times per week).

The enrichment program is most important in La Escuelita. Visits by special guests, that is hispanic natives, are encouraged. They speak to the school as a whole or to individual classes. This relates the classroom culture study to the real world. They share audio-visual programs as a total group so that all can learn and share from each other. The folk-dance program is most successful. This consists of a half-hour of folk dance instruction given to the entire school once during each session by a professional folk-dance instructor. At first the participants show great reticence to dancing together but at the end of the year's program of three sessions the children become well accostumed to dancing, following the instructions well, and enjoying it thoroughly. In addition to offering cultural enrichment it also allows for motor skill-development so important for elemntary level children. It is a way for some limited socialization and an opportunity for instant

success and positive feelings on the part of the students. The faculty, of course, participates and all have a great time.

Arts and craft type of activites also are encouraged. Some types could include a clay creation of a scene that may represent a cultureal point, or some musical instrument that can accompany a musical production, or some artistic illustrations to supplement the play presentation. These are informative and creative expressions that complement and enrich the regular class lessons. It can turn an academic lesson into a really enjoyable experience.

Of course, all these comments and descriptions in this report have been mostly in the positive vein. Some past problems should be indicated however. By being made aware of them perhaps they can be eliminated in your beginnings of establishing a primary-level school for Spanish instruction. (1) The handling of monies (supplies and salaries) has been a problem. La Escuelita is a professionally designed, organized, executed school but the handling of monies has not been. (2) The assignment of students to the various classes is a problem. The main concern is that each young student be placed at the most propitious position for the most effective learning experience. The real factors at hand some times make this a difficult problem to solve. It appears that the greater the enrollment and greater the faculty, the smaller the problem of class assignments.

(3)Another problem can be the lack of publicity and the uncontrolled disemination of the informative materials. The success of the program is greatly related to its publicity. Again, the PTA is not a professional organization dedicated to advertising techniques. The disemination process is done through the young children themselves who bring home the notices and registration forms. Obviously many sheets never reach the parent (or guardian). There could be much improvement in this area. However, the devotion and sincerity

of the supportive groups is outstanding. Of course, one of the greatest publicity tactics is word-of-mouth publicity. In time, if the school continues with its record of success perhaps no external publicity will be ever needed. Nothing succeeds so well as success.

If the public school system were to some day include a formal program of second language learning in its primary-level curriculum then La Escuelita would no longer be needed. This would mean that this important and appropriate learning experience could be offfered to all young children and not only to those who can pay the fee and can find means of transportation. But until that change becomes a reality all the Escuelitas throughout the United States are needed. Therefore, we plan on continuing La Escuelita as long as the status quo exists.

Establishing a primary-level school of second language learning is important, possible and pleasureable. It requires certain ingredients: (1) enthusiastic, creative, and sincere teachers, (2) approval from school officials for a healthy and stable beginning and maintenance, (3) a strong support group, (4) interested students and supportive parents, and finally, ¡mucha buena suerte!

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